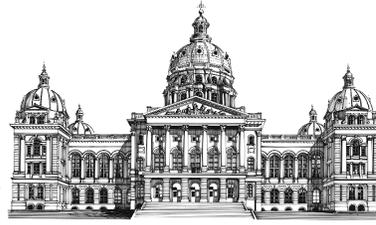


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# Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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## Refugee and Immigrant Growth in the State of Iowa

### ISSUE

This *Issue Review* examines the population growth of refugees and immigrants in the State of Iowa and the potential effect on the Departments of Education, Human Rights, Workforce Development, and Human Services.

### AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Education  
Department of Human Rights  
Department of Human Services, Refugee Services  
Workforce Development

### CODE AUTHORITY

Section 216A, Code of Iowa

### BACKGROUND

A refugee is a person who flees their country and is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or the fear of persecution based upon race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. An immigrant is a person who migrates to another country for permanent residence yet they may return to their country of origin if they so chose. An alien is a foreign-born resident who has not been naturalized and who owes allegiance to another country. The United States government offers both international refugee assistance and domestic refugee resettlement through the Department of State.

In September 1975, Governor Robert Ray accepted a request from the President to resettle the Indo-Chinese in Iowa. In 1975, the Vietnamese were the largest refugee group in Iowa. In 1986, after several organizational and name changes, the Governor's Task Force for Indo-Chinese Resettlement was renamed the Bureau of Refugee Services and located in the Department of Human Services.

The Bureau of Refugee Services has 26.0 FTE positions and 13 contracts with four cities across the State of Iowa. Those cities are Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, and Davenport. It is a federally funded program. The federal grant awards issued to the Bureau in FFY 1999 totaled \$4,228,700. Because it is a federally funded program, funding sources can not be mixed for services provided. The purpose of the Bureau of Refugee Services is to

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provide for the effective resettlement of refugees by assisting them in becoming self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

All but three States in the United States have a refugee program. Iowa is unique because it is the only State to have a contract with the federal government as a public, non-profit organization that provides resettlement services for 90 or 120 days. The State of Iowa also has a central service staff that travels throughout the State of Iowa and also contracts for services with various community agencies.

Since 1990, the State has received an annual average of over 2,600 new legal immigrants and refugees. Since the 1990 Census, the State's population has increased by approximately 19,000 immigrants, while during the same period the State's population has decreased by about 13,000 due to Iowans leaving the State. Since 1997, Refugee Services reported that Bosnians were the largest refugee group entering the State of Iowa. In FY 1996, the number of new immigrants to Iowa was 3,037. The top three countries with immigrants and refugees entering Iowa are Mexico, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service estimated that in 1996 there were 6,400 resident illegal aliens in Iowa. The Service also estimated that in 1996 there were approximately 27,000 legal immigrant residents in Iowa of which approximately 15,000 (55.0%) had met the residency requirement to apply for citizenship.

In 1997, Iowa was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> highest in the country in the rate of population increase attributed to direct immigrant settlement, with over 65.0% of the State's population growth due to immigration. The 1997 Census Bureau population projection estimates Iowa's population will grow by 7.0% between 1995 and 2025 (to 3,040,000).

As of April 1999, the population in Iowa is 2.9 million. Currently, Southeast Asians are the largest refugee group in the State; however, many of them have already achieved citizen status. The two largest refugee groups in Iowa are 10,000 Southeast Asians (many of them are already citizens) and 7,000 Bosnians.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

According to the Department of Education, 9,160 students in 324 schools in Iowa participated in Limited English Proficiency (LEP) classes in 1998-1999. The following are the top five languages spoken by non-English speaking students:

1. Spanish	5,460
2. Vietnamese	815
3. Bosnian	660
4. Lao	488
5. German	150

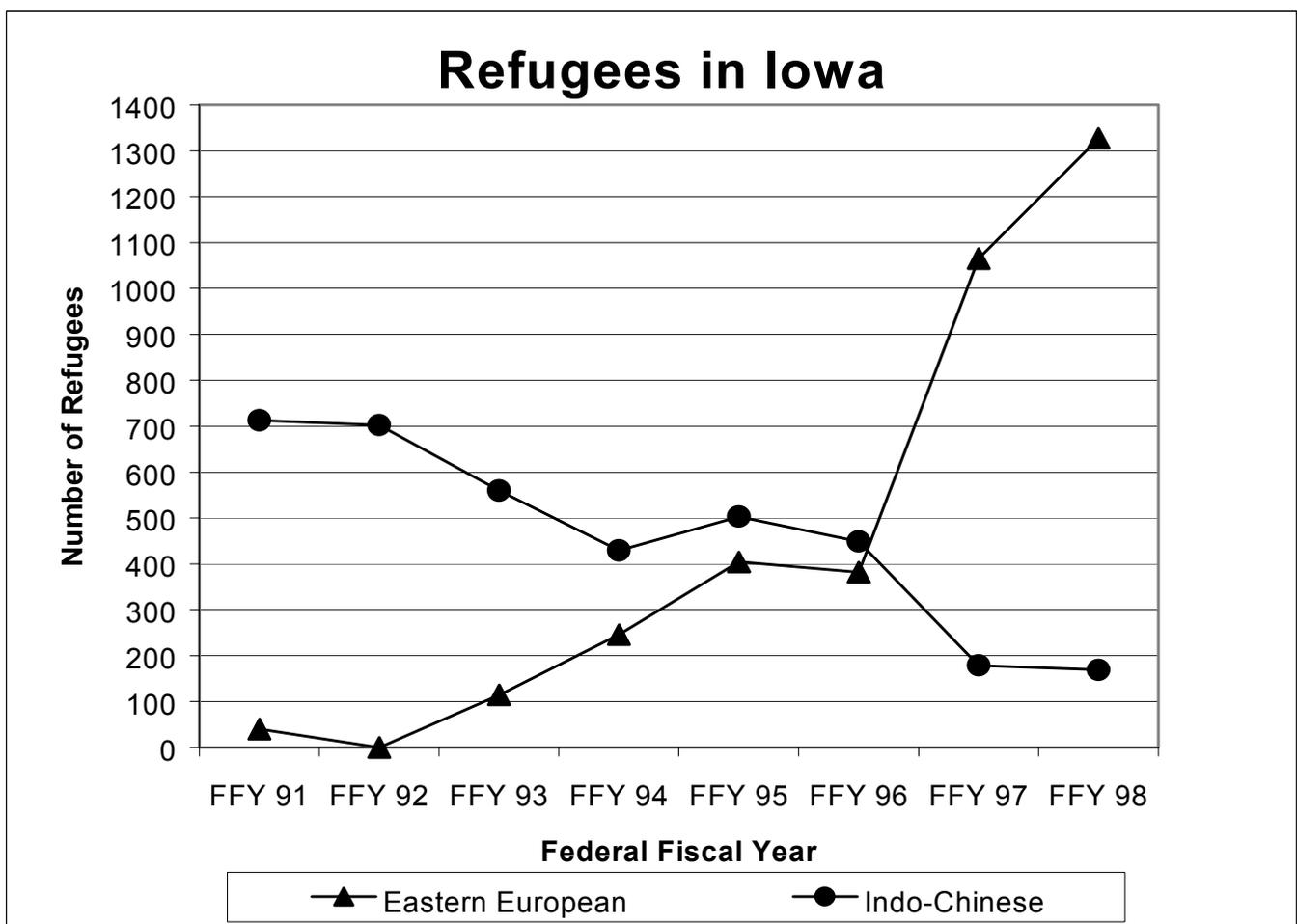
Since 1997, Iowa has seen an increase of Bosnian refugees to the State. There were 1,677 refugee arrivals in Iowa during FFY 1998. This is an increase of 255 (17.9%) from the previous year. For FFY 1998, Iowa was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> for resettlement arrivals. The following is a breakout of that total:

- 1,327 Bosnians
- 169 Vietnamese

- 151 Africans
- 24 Russians
- 6 Iraqis

From January 1999 to the end of July 1999, there have been 518 refugees admitted to Iowa through the Lutheran Social Services Program.

In FFY 1991, there were 854 refugees including 713 Indo-Chinese. In FFY 1993, Iowa experienced the lowest influx of refugees with a total of 824 (560 Indo-Chinese). Starting in FFY 1997, there were more Eastern European refugees than Indo-Chinese by a rate of 1,065 to 179. The chart below compares the number of Indo-Chinese and Eastern European immigrants since FFY 1991.



**ALTERNATIVES/ BUDGET IMPACT**

Currently, cultural minorities represented in the Department of Human Rights are those served by the Status of Latino Affairs and the Status of African Americans. Following are potential alternatives and associated costs, by ethnicity, for addressing the needs of refugee and immigrant groups in Iowa.

**SOUTHEAST ASIA: 10,000 REFUGEES IN THE STATE OF IOWA**

For FY 2000, Governor Vilsack recommended funding for a new Division on Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders within the Department of Human Rights. The estimated cost to establish the Division is \$130,000 to \$157,000. The following nationalities were intended to be represented by the Division: Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Samoan, Guamanian, Lao, Cambodian, Hmong, Black Tai, and other Asians or Pacific Islanders. According to the Bureau of Refugee Services, the proposed Division would not represent Koreans, Chinese, and/or Asian Indians if it were entitled Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders. The title of Asian and Pacific Islanders would provide a more complete representation of all the nationalities that make up this ethnicity.

The 1999 General Assembly did not approve funding for a Division for Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders. Instead, House File 737, FY 2000 Health and Human Rights Appropriations Act, passed by the 1999 General Assembly requires that the Department of Human Rights conduct a study of the status of persons of Asian Pacific Islander descent in the State of Iowa. The study is to focus on the areas of education, language development, employment, human rights, health, housing, and social welfare. The Director of the Department of Human Rights is required to submit a report of the findings and recommendations based on the study to the General Assembly by January 1, 2000.

**EASTERN EUROPE: 7,000 REFUGEES IN THE STATE OF IOWA**

In April 1999, Governor Vilsack announced that individuals who legally reside in Iowa may start the process to bring over their Kosovar relatives. In the initial stages, the United States government will only process those refugees from the countries of Albania and Macedonia. It is assumed that white, non-English speaking ethnicities such as Bosnians would be increasing in the State of Iowa. Currently, these ethnic groups are being categorized as white or Caucasian and therefore not showing up as a growing ethnic population in Iowa. However, since 1997, Bosnians have been the largest refugee group.

The number of Bosnian refugees being admitted to Iowa is expected to stay the same. The number of Kosovar refugees is expected to be limited. The increase of Kosovar refugees is not expected to affect the number of Bosnian refugees that are allowed to enter Iowa. The Bureau of Refugee Services is expecting to resettle 700 Bosnian refugees this year, of an estimated 1,600 for the State of Iowa.

**COMBINED – ALL SERVED AND UNSERVED MINORITY GROUPS**

If a Division is created for the Southeast Asians/Pacific Islanders, then an argument could be made that one should be created for Eastern Europeans. Most of the Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders immigrated to Iowa during the late 70's and early 80's. The United States, for the most part, has stopped processing refugees from Southeast Asia. Ten years ago, 100,000 Southeast Asian refugees were coming to the United States each year and today only a couple thousand are admitted each year. With the events in the Balkans, Russia, and Eastern Europe in general, it may be necessary to address the Eastern European influx as seriously as the Southeast Asian/Pacific Islander populations in Iowa.

**STATE-FUNDED DIVISION OF REFUGEE SERVICES**

One option to increase services for immigrants and refugees in the State would be to establish a Division of Refugee Services that is State-funded as well as federally funded. The Bureau of Refugee Services has only made one request for State money throughout its existence but the Bureau did not receive funds because the request was withdrawn. The Bureau for Refugee Services is a State agency and therefore could receive State money. The main concern with this

option is that the two funding streams could not be allowed to mix. Strict bookkeeping would be required in order to maintain federal funding.

Currently, the federal government has very clear guidelines established for voluntary agencies. These agencies are funded only for refugees, not immigrants. The problem with this is that the voluntary agencies would be greatly influenced by their national agencies, which have contracts with the federal government. This would be in direct conflict with any contract that the State government would want to establish.

#### **COMBINED - COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION**

Another option would be to combine the Bureau of Refugee Services, Division of Latino Affairs, and the Status of African Americans into one entity such as a Commission on Immigration. The Commission could work directly with the Departments of Human Services, Education, and Human Rights to coordinate efforts to establish the best services for refugee resettlement and immigration services as well as coordinating with the voluntary resettlement agencies in the State of Iowa. By combining these agencies into one, instead of having separate divisions with 2.0 to 3.0 FTE positions, a larger division with 10.0 to 12.0 FTE positions could be created to provide more efficient services across Iowa.

The Commission could also coordinate services with Workforce Development. During the 1999 Session, SF 449, English Language Assistance, proposed a "Center for New Iowans." The legislation did not pass, but a working group is currently developing plans for using the funding for a similar entity.

Such an entity would coordinate community services, help with the assimilation of new immigrants and their families to the community, and involve the participation of business entities to access specific skills and talents of these individuals. An office may be established in Des Moines to allow access to needed services under one roof rather than in separate parts of the State. The strategy would be to coordinate an inter-relationship between social and economic issues concerning immigration and workforce development such as housing, transportation, education, workforce training and healthcare.

If refugee assistance, immigrant assistance, language translation and interpretation assistance, as well as referral services, job development, training and placement, and access to English proficiency classes could all be combined into one central agency, it would eliminate unequal treatment of growing ethnic groups in Iowa.

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